

SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
Comments on Steps to Prosperity
As adopted by the Education Oversight Committee on January 16, 2003

The Education Oversight Committee has reviewed Steps to Prosperity and offers comments for consideration during the development and implementation of the workforce education recommendations.

The EOC sees the workforce education recommendations as supportive and integral to the achievement of SC's 2010 goal and the provisions of *No Child Left Behind*. Changes in curriculum and school programs that motivate and engage students are critical to improvement in SC's schools and the development of a healthy economy for the state. The EOC recommends that implementation be accomplished in a manner that does not add to the bureaucracy but is most visible in the concrete linkages between schools and businesses.

Steps to Prosperity offers ten "key projects" and our comments below address each of them:

1. Replace the 1994 South Carolina School-to-Work Transition Act with New Legislation.

We agree that new legislation is necessary. That legislation should (a) define a mechanism that promotes the common goal and ensures responsibility among all involved in implementation; (b) link implementation to the economic development of the state; (c) provide or expand the capacity of private and public employers to provide meaningful workplace experiences; and (d) define criteria for dual credit or advanced placement status in postsecondary courses.

Implementation of the new legislation *must* be accomplished through guidance from and work with middle and high school principals and through early and continuing involvement of all the agencies involved. The involvement of these groups, early in the process, is essential if the program is to achieve the results promoted. We believe these agencies to include the SBE, SDE, CHE, SBTCE, Department of Commerce, ESC, EOC and educators at districts and schools and in postsecondary institutions.

The legislation should incorporate benchmarks to measure the stages of implementation scheduled over a series of years and annual costs to state and local agencies provided.

2. Reorganize the curriculum around clusters of study.

We support the implementation of a reorganized curriculum but offer several caveats:

- Funding should be provided to each high school to support the school's implementation of the High Schools That Work model;
- Actions and resources should ensure that schools and students in rural SC have equal access to workplace shadowing, mentoring, apprenticeships or other activities;
- Employers and businesses should be prepared and provided incentives to support mentorships, apprenticeships, etc. Clear descriptions of the strategies and costs should be provided;
- Business representatives should have a visible presence on school campuses to provide multiple opportunities for interaction and to ensure student success.

3. Retool Educator Preparation and Professional Development

We believe that professional development should enable teachers to achieve the desired results, but not prescribe a particular method of teaching.

4. Seamlessly Connect P-12 Education, Postsecondary Education and the Workplace

We recommend defining the criteria for courses to be included in articulation agreements and that the agreements be developed in conjunction with SBTCE, CHE and the institutions.

5. Revitalize Career Guidance and Counseling.

We support the career development guidance curriculum but recommend strong actions to ensure that those delivering the curriculum fully understand business and industry so that their support and advice are meaningful. The current barriers must be eliminated.

The proposal calls for counseling approaches and goals different from the traditional. We recommend that the pool of individuals serving in a counseling role be expanded to include professionals with human resource training from business and not be limited to those with traditional counseling certificates. Education and related experience in business and industry should be recognized for workforce preparation counseling.

Costs for traditional or workforce counselors should be detailed to include costs to the state and to local districts. The availability of appropriate personnel should be provided and, if insufficient numbers are available, information on recruitment, training and placement presented.

6. Establish Alternatives for At-Risk Students

The EOC does not support alternative diplomas. We recognize that many students enter high school without the necessary skills. This achievement deficit should be corrected and strategies should be employed to ensure that the opportunity for a full high school diploma never is compromised.

7. Integrate Character Education into All Schooling

The EOC supports the policy requirements in the Family Respect Act and the efforts of schools to implement character development programs. The EOC currently is piloting a program measure on character development for potential inclusion on the school report card.

8. Streamline and Focus Resources

The EOC recommends that particular attention be paid to characteristics of successful Tech Prep consortia in the organization of the new centers and that a plan be developed to ensure that the needs of small and rural counties are addressed in the development of linkages with employers.

9. Conduct Extensive Outreach

The EOC has no specific comment but supports outreach efforts.

10. Assure Accountability

The EOC questions the need for another governing or oversight body. If workforce preparation is to be integrated into the education program fully, then the governance function should be integrated into existing structures (i.e., SBE, EOC, SBTCE, and CHE). For example, changes in the P-12 curriculum should be implemented by the SDE and regulated by the SBE. Accountability functions should be incorporated into the current school accountability system. To ensure that workforce issues are well-represented, the General Assembly may wish to consider some expansion of the EOC membership and/or linking an advisory group on workforce readiness to the EOC.